



Digital activists Sri Lanka

## CAPABILITY STATEMENT

DIGITALIZATION

FOR VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION

## ICT4D AT HELVETAS

Digitalization is a major trend influencing politics, economies and societies globally. It comes with enormous opportunities, but also bears the risk of leaving already disadvantaged people even further behind. Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D), which is the use of digital

technology for more impact and scale in development and humanitarian actions, has gained importance over the past decade – and the trend is accelerating. Helvetas aims to use the tremendous opportunities ICT4D offers, while being conscious about the risks.

### Helvetas' work on ICT4D is part of the organization's overall digitalization vision:



To leverage digitalization to ensure efficient ways of working and quality;



To leverage digitalization to increase efficiency and outreach in communication and marketing;



To foster a digital culture (that supports learning);



To understand and react adequately to how the global digital transformation impacts societies, our sector and organization;



To leverage digitalization to achieve larger and more inclusive development impact;



To use and promote digital technologies in proficient ways.

## ICT4D IN VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION WORKING AREA

### What We Do in Voice, Inclusion & Cohesion

The Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion (VIC) Working Area applies ICT4D solutions to support local partners and actors in achieving sustainable impact and systemic change that amplifies the voices of vulnerable communities, migrants and refugees; enhances the space for civil society and the private sector to meaningfully participate in inclusive decision making; and builds the capacities of public institutions to deliver gender and youth-responsive services and to articulate transformative policies for a cohesive society. The VIC Working Area fosters voice, inclusion and cohesion across its three working fields: governance and civic space; migration; and conflict transformation.

**Governance and civic space:** Our aim is to ensure that civil society and people can claim their rights and meaningfully engage in decision-making and policy processes. To achieve this, we empower communities and develop the capacity of civil society

organizations (CSOs) to wield influence and support local governments in their responsibility to manage public resources efficiently and transparently.

**Conflict transformation:** We build cohesive societies where people can live in dignity by fostering peaceful relationships and creating spaces to exchange ideas, prevent radicalization of youth, and constructively resolve disputes by tackling their root causes and potential drivers.

**Migration:** We maximize the development benefits of migration and protect the rights of migrant workers and their families by strengthening institutions that work at the interface between governments, migrants and migrant organizations in the places of origin and destination.

Visit our website [here](#) to learn more about earn more about Helvetas' Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion work.

## ICT4D Opportunities and Risks in Voice, Inclusion & Cohesion

Over the past decade, a plethora of e-Government programs and projects have been piloted and implemented globally within the sphere of international development cooperation. Challenges of e-Government include digital security and management of a large volume of data, enhanced surveillance, politically motivated infodemics on social media, increasing the digital divide and closures of online civic spaces.

There is a risk of leaving behind those who are not tech-savvy or do not have access to internet and IT devices. But the Covid pandemic has brought more focus to ICT4D's transformational potential; for example, by promoting virtual state-citizens engagement at the local governance level and creating opportunity for civil society to dialogue more regularly with government stakeholders in policy processes. Administrative online services such as issuance of birth certificates, land title deeds and travel documents are accelerating and contributing to improved service delivery. Easy access to such services is especially important for migrant workers, supporting their safe and orderly migration. Case management databases are also being set up for migrant workers, with the purpose of documenting and handling cases of abuse, indecent work, poor living conditions or Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), which they may face while working in the countries of destination. Information management systems are also being developed to map out migrants' personal data, skills and employment opportunities, which is helpful both when preparing to migrate and afterwards to reintegrate into their countries of origin.

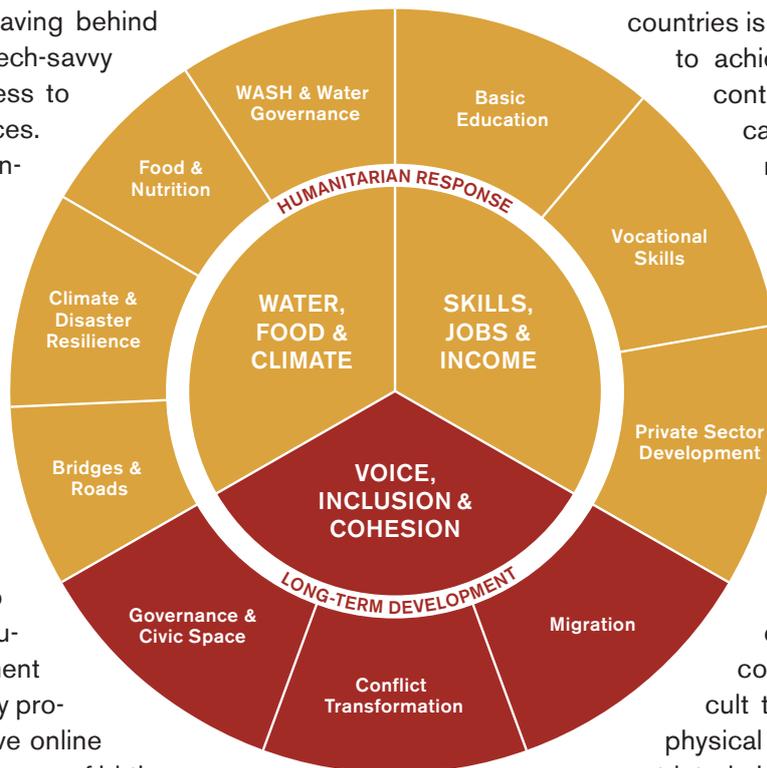
For civil society organizations, ICT4D offers an opportunity to access information, build campaigns and to advocate in policy processes more easily. For

both CSOs and government actors, shorter, more frequent and lower-cost exchanges allow for more sustained engagement over a long period rather than expensive, intense and time-bound face-to-face consultations, hearings and workshops. ICT4D also allows for the setup of safe digital spaces and protection mechanisms for human rights activists. Activists can connect virtually with each other to share experiences and collaborate on global topics that affect us all. Since civil society in most

countries is scrambling for funding to achieve their mission and continuously develop their capacities, online grants management mechanisms, virtual hubs for shared learning, online trainings and development of ICT strategies have proven to be effective means.

In fragile contexts, digital spaces can enable practitioners to keep engaged and communicate with communities during difficult times, especially when physical movements are restricted during pandemics, conflict and war. Timely communications

through digital messaging can also support early warning and early response activities. ICT4D offers faster access to information for conflict analysis and the latest developments during a conflict transformation process. Purposeful misinformation campaigns on social media present a risk, while opportunities exist to build networks for youth activists (who are often tech savvy), to debunk fake news and to facilitate fact-based information and advocacy campaigns. It is crucial to consider youth in conflict transformation processes since they are prone to becoming drivers of conflict. Youth in particular are susceptible to social media hate speech and algorithmic biases that can be used by antagonizers to create new forms of polarization, inter-group tensions, exclusion and discrimination.

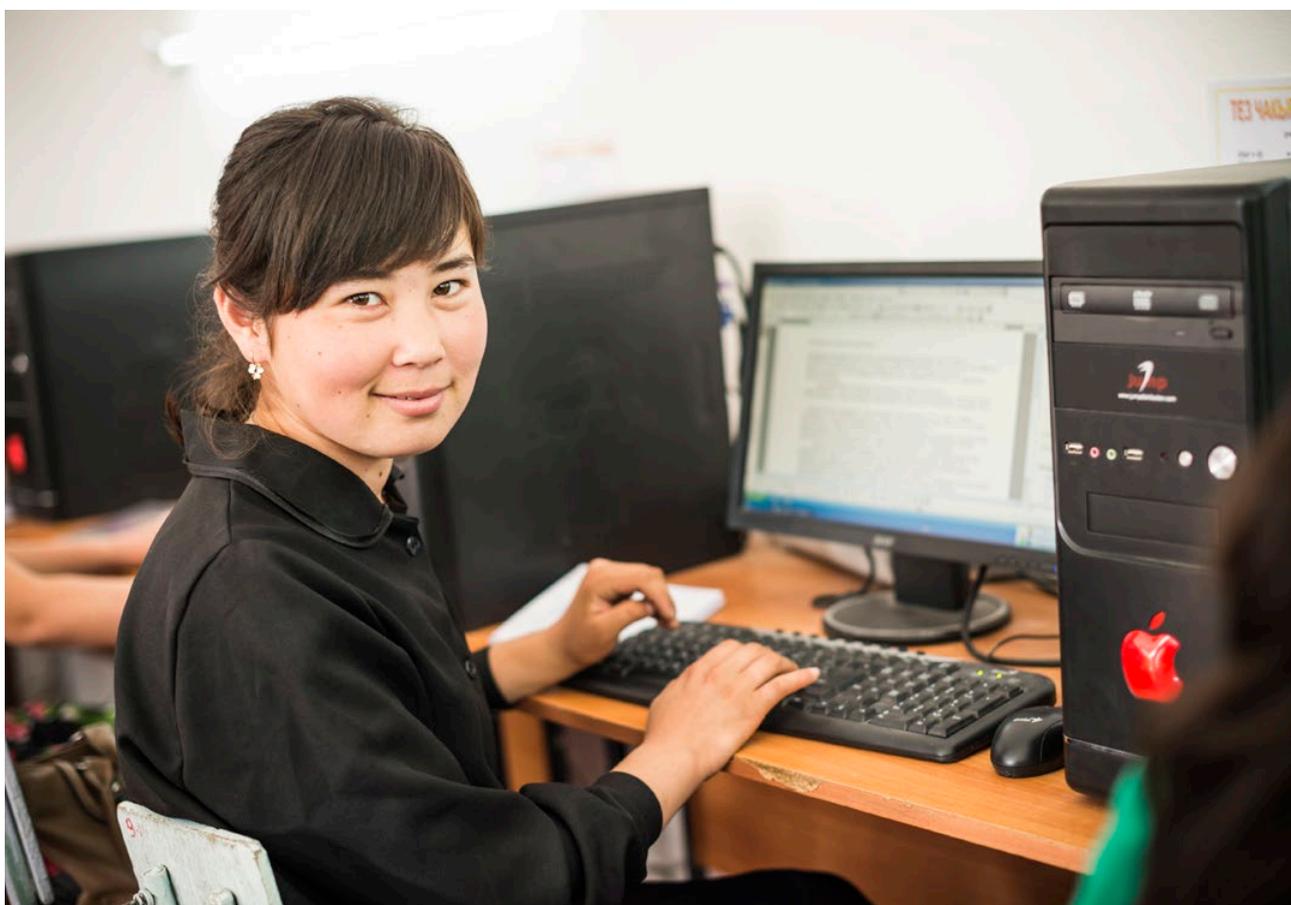


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**“It is crucial to consider youth in conflict transformation processes”**  
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## Strategic ICT4D Areas in Voice, Inclusion & Cohesion

While the VIC Working Area keeps abreast of new digital developments and approaches, the current focus is to learn, replicate and scale up ICT4D solutions that are already implemented in completed and ongoing projects. The digitalized solutions that have proven effective and created impact so far are categorized below into primary strategic areas for each VIC working field:

WORKING FIELD	ICT4D STRATEGIC AREAS IN VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION
Governance & Civic Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provision of digitalized government services</li><li>• Virtual civic engagement with local governments</li><li>• Setting up safe and protected spaces for civil society activists</li><li>• Providing online learning, online grant access and development of ICT strategies for CSOs</li></ul>
Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provision of online administrative services for safe and orderly migration</li><li>• Setting up Migration Information Management Services</li></ul>
Conflict Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Countering hate speech and misinformation on social media</li><li>• Building youth communities for access to and factchecking of information</li><li>• Setting up early warning and response systems</li></ul>



Nursuluu Sharapova from Kyzyl-Abad (Kyrgyzstan) in her computer class.

### The Decentralization and Local Development Program in Albania

The Decentralization and Local Development Program (DLDP) was implemented during a time of extensive government reforms in Albania. This included a process of territorial and administrative reform where the number of municipalities was reduced (through mergers) from 384 to 61. Emphasizing the need to maintain effective administrative service provision, DLDP supported the development of digitalized and integrated One-Stop Shops (iOSSH) – whereby local governments offer multiple services from one consolidated office operating at multiple fixed locations across the new territories.



Official launch of one-stop-shop, Shkoder municipality

#### Selected results

Since 2016, over 100,000 citizens have received services via integrated One-Stop Shops. 86 services were reconfigured and made available online. Also, policy recommendations on e-services have been integrated into the legal framework and a national curriculum was designed and rolled out to municipal employees through the School of Public Administrations.

#### Key features and insights

- The iOSSH model aims to offer the same level of administrative service – qualitatively and quantitatively – in both urban and remote rural locations
- The intervention packages encompassed administrative procedures based on reengineering of work processes, software design, and training toolkits

### The Municipal Economic Development Project in Serbia

The Municipal Economic Development (MED) project promotes inclusive and participatory local governance so that citizens and local businesses can engage in decision-making and hold municipalities to account for the planning and use of financial resources. A key focus is improving the management of collected property tax so that more revenues are available for public services and infrastructure.



Official webpage, UIS

#### Selected results

Providing support to 40 municipalities and working with central ministries to reform property tax management nationwide has so far resulted in the integration of all 145 Serbian Local Tax Administrations and 3,000,000 property taxpayers into a web-based Unified Information System (UIS). As a direct result, municipalities have increased property tax revenue by 70 million EURO. The number of registered properties has increased by almost 30%.

#### Key features and insights

- Digital solutions to property tax management have strong potential for systemic and sustainable impact
- Working with government ministries, adhering to the national vision for e-Government and nudging policy makers to make reform is crucial for large-scale impact
- Using national media such as talk shows and news programs to raise awareness about the importance of paying property tax and making use of the online system was pertinent to the project's success

## Preventing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka & Bangladesh

Helvetas and local partners are mobilizing and capacitating civil society organizations in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to prevent violent extremism (PVE). In addition to receiving training on PVE, civil society practitioners participate in monthly digital exchanges and have created a joint digital platform for sharing knowledge and good practices. CSOs are also supported to develop and implement PVE initiatives in their local contexts.

### Selected results

The project has facilitated social media campaigns to counter extremist narratives. In both countries, the social media campaigns sought to address polarization and misinformation linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Bangladesh, the campaign “Promoting Harmony, Not the Virus” reached 126,000 people. In Sri Lanka, the “Alter Hate” campaign reached 29,925.

### Key features and insights

- Digital cross-country exchanges can work well, despite digital infrastructure challenges.
- Anti-discrimination messaging is most effective when coupled with a contemporary topic.
- Posts that balanced anti-discriminatory messages and COVID-19 information, rather than just anti-discrimination, got the most engagement.
- Messaging and campaign designs should consider age and gender diversity. Online campaigns should be combined with offline campaigns if all target groups are to be reached.
- Social media posts should be smartly designed to convert audience reach into audience engagement.



Campaign with the national peace council of Sri Lanka fighting against racially motivated hate, discrimination and violence

## The InSPIRE Project in Sri Lanka

The project “Incubator Space for Promoting Information Right and Freedom of Expression” (InSPIRE) aims to contribute to the enhancement of democracy and human rights in Sri Lanka. Young future media professionals at four universities in Sri Lanka are being empowered to creatively express and advocate for gender-sensitive freedom of expression and ethically and socially responsible media expression



InSPIRE logo for social media activism

### Selected results

After two years, a socially responsible network of 489 journalism and media students has been created; almost all have attended virtual training sessions on freedom of expression and information. Plans for incubator spaces to foster creative, multidisciplinary learning and collaboration on multi-media products at three universities have been elaborated and approved in virtual consultations with students and academics. A research study on Freedom of Expression and the new media culture in Sri Lanka was produced. The #Choosetochallenge social media campaign celebrating the achievements of several young women belonging to the network reached an audience of 25,305 Facebook users, eliciting 2,844 engagements and 1,799 reactions.

### Key features and insights

- The project particularly resonates with young women, who make up 84% of network members.
- The physical incubator spaces are an important tool to promote exchange and creative collaboration since students prefer to meet in person rather than online.

## The Bashki te Forta Project in Albania

Bashki te Forta supports decentralization and promotes good governance, focusing on transparency and accountability through budget performance, strengthening the role of municipal councils and management models of selected services. Bashki te Forta has supported online participatory budgeting across 61 municipalities in Albania. The system enables citizens and local councils to inform budget allocation priorities at the municipal level and to provide feedback on municipality service performance.



Online consultation on facebook

### Selected results

80,000 people tune in annually through various digital platforms for the process of budget consultation. 30% of recommendations deriving from the process (both digital and onsite) were integrated into budget documents for 2021.

### Key features and insights

- It is important to leave no one behind by offering hybrid virtual and onsite consultations
- National government software provides for cost efficiency, but should leave room for locally customized solutions
- The use of open-source platforms makes solutions cost-efficient and sustainable at the local level
- Friendly and simple citizen-oriented e-messaging enhances the popularity of digital tools

## Digital Advocates for Reforms in Lebanon

Helvetas and our partner DOT Lebanon are equipping CSOs with 21<sup>st</sup> century ICT tools and skills. Good ICT4D practices are introduced towards strengthening the operational capacities of CSOs and their ability to engage communities and to use digital channels for meaningful and inclusive advocacy initiatives on social and economic reform processes. The project interventions are designed based on the principles of leaving no one behind and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA).



CSO training on digital tools

### Selected results

Participating CSOs have undertaken a digital capacity assessment to identify gaps in current ICT4D skills and practices. Follow-up capacity building events have supported CSOs to create customized organizational digital strategies that integrate ITC into organizational and outreach processes.

### Key features and insights

- Ad hoc coaching is an effective approach for technical implementation of systems such as: collaboration, communication and coordination tools, cloud storage (Google and Microsoft) and local storage (QNAP)
- Digital strategies and capacity building have enabled CSOs to integrate digital fundraising platforms, data management systems and accounting systems into workflows
- Assignment of digital champions to lead the digital transformation process enabled the project to mainstream the digital culture within each organization

## Strengthened and Informative Migration System Project in Bangladesh

Helvetas implements the Strengthened and Informative Migration System (SIMS) project to mitigate the negative impacts and risks related to labor migration, while maximizing its benefits. The project aims to improve the well-being of migrants through safer migration practices and strengthened service delivery at the different stages of pre-departure, during migration to countries of destination and upon return and re-integration to Bangladesh.



Migrants queuing for fingerprinting, Demo Compound, Cumilla

### Selected results

SIMS has developed a web-based case management and documentation system which improves handling the reported cases of abuse and make referral to formal channels of redress. The system includes detailed information about justice seekers and perpetrators, enabling project actors to efficiently store, access and analyze information and effectively preserve relevant evidence, while monitoring and tracking progress in the future.

### Key features and insights

- The web-based documentation system is a good practice for other civil society organizations and development stakeholders, who are working on labor migration, to replicate. Like SIMS, they can use the system as a platform for dealing with migrant rights violation cases and, eventually, also for coordinated and evidence-based advocacy.

## VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION CAPACITIES

### Advisory Services for ICT4D

The Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion team consists of gender balanced, highly professional, committed and multilingual advisors with several years of experience working in international development cooperation across the globe.

To test, scale up and bring about systemic change with our ICT4D solutions, the VIC team:

- Supports the design, implementation, adaptation and reviews of VIC projects with ICT4D components
- Facilitates collaborations with ICT4D companies and specialized organizations that can support our partnerships with civil society, government agencies, academia and private sector actors
- Promotes innovative ICT4D solutions in projects through applied research, sourcing of good international practices and facilitating global exchange of know-how
- Capitalizes and shares project experiences with ICT4D
- Profiles ICT4D solutions in events, networks and publications
- Provides online learning and facilitates virtual events on VIC topics to internal staff and external audiences

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